

(Colossians) 03 Pauls Prayer to the Father Continues

by Bob Utley

Bob Utley's sermon on Colossians emphasizes the importance of prayer, knowledge, and living a fruitful Christian life filled with joy and gratitude.

Duration: 35:24

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 2:8-9, Colossians 1:9-10, Hebrews 3:2

Topics: "Colossians"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of giving thanks to God, even in difficult circumstances. He highlights the contrast between light and darkness as metaphors for good and evil. The sermon transitions to discussing the Son, Jesus Christ, and the need to live a life in honor of God. The speaker emphasizes the importance of living out the truth and knowledge of God in all aspects of life, rather than compartmentalizing it into sacred and secular. Additionally, he calls for believers to bear fruit in their daily interpersonal relationships, emphasizing the ongoing nature of fruit-bearing in the Christian life.

Transcript

Wow, what a powerful song. Thank you, thank you. Gives me goosebumps.

Well, I'm glad to be back with you. I was gone just a week, but I felt like it was a month. My car wanted to go the different way.

I really want to encourage you about being here for this CD distribution. Now, this is not going to be a heavy deal, but this is going to be a really important deal. And when somebody sees an older person walking up to their door with difficulty walking to give them a CD about Jesus, it's going to mean something to them.

So don't be telling me you're too old and too busy. Amen? It's time to get on and do it. Amen? I spent most of last year doing a commentary on Isaiah 1-39.

It just was put online this week. So I hope you'll look at that and pray for me. It really was an exciting year for me doing that.

I get goosebumps when I think about getting to come and preach to you on Colossians. I mean, this is just a marvelous Christological book. This is just one of the high watermarks in the New Testament on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

I'm really looking forward to getting to verse 15 through 20, and I hope to be there next week. But I was a little surprised that there seemed to be two prayers by Paul to God the Father in connection with these churches of the Lycus River Valley, Colossians, Hierapolis, and Laodicea. And the reason I think there are two prayers is two of the things he mentioned in verses 3-8, he surprisingly repeats beginning in 9-14, and it just seems too close of a context to have these things again.

He mentions that I heard. He's talking about hearing from, of course, Epaphras in verses 8-9 where he told Paul about these churches. Paul did not start these churches.

And that's mentioned again. Mentioned again in verse 9. And he talks about bearing fruit in his first prayer. And now he's going to talk about bearing fruit again.

That seems very close to mention those. I don't know if Paul wrote this and waited a while and then came back and prayed again or if Paul wrote it and went back and read it and added a prayer. I don't really know of the editing process of how Paul did this.

We're not sure how much freedom that a scribe or an amanuensis would have on Paul dictating these letters and a scribe putting it in a form. I'm not sure about that. But these prayers of Paul are, well, they give us insight into the heart of the apostle.

And because of our view of inspiration, they give us insight into the heart of God for his will, not only for these Colossian Christians, but his will for us. So I want to make a note of some of the points of this prayer. And I really want to encourage you to read verses 15 through 20 for next week.

And I hope you'll read it several times in several translations. And it would be very helpful if you tried to outline it. What exactly is he saying about Jesus Christ, the Son? I think this is one of those sermons that we're all going to get up and shout, Thank you, God, for Jesus Christ.

Now, this week we may not get up and shout, but there are some really good points here. And I hope you will follow with me. It's interesting to me to note that verses 9 through 20 are really one sentence in Greek, which means that we only break it up at our peril.

And yet for English way of looking at this, it looks like this breaks into several distinct categories. I still believe that Ephesians is based almost exactly on the same outline as Colossians. And when I look at Paul's prayer in Ephesians, a cyclical letter, he does a prayer to the Trinity.

And the Trinity is, of course, seen in this opening prayer too. I would say, though, as Ephesians primarily is a prayer to God the Father for what he's done in the past, and for God the Father for sending Jesus into time, and God the Father sending the Holy Spirit to be with us through time. Again, these prayers are prayers to God the Father.

I remember in seminary, I forgot who it was, said to me, you know, the Baptists emphasize Jesus, the Charismatic emphasize the Spirit, and the Episcopal emphasizes the Father. We have got to get him back together. Amen? I mean, this is a unified God.

And we need to remember it's not an angry Old Testament God and a loving New Testament Jesus. Oh, my goodness. It is God the Father that sent the Son.

It is the Father that sends the Spirit. It is the Father who wants the redemption of those creatures made in his image. I hope our emphasis on Jesus, and thank God for our emphasis on him, but I hope that we never eclipse the glory of God the Father in our emphasis to give due honor to the Son.

And by the way, Baptists, that may be true about the Spirit, too. Just a thought. Now, the heart of it, of course, is from Epiphra.

And I was thinking when I was looking this morning going over these notes, that when Paul says, we have not ceased to pray for you, I started to preach at my home church, First Baptist Church of Bel Air, Texas, and I have never really been asked to come back there to do anything. I don't know if when the pastor changed, they forgot me or what. I've often grieved some wondering if the church who, in a sense, birthed me through Sunday school and the church that encouraged me when I was younger still prays for me.

I wonder if I asked Lakeside if they could list the number of missionaries, preachers, counselors, youth directors that have surrendered to preach here, if there's somebody still praying for those young men and women. There must be something very important about us not ceasing to pray for those in whose lives we are able to bring something of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul says, I never ceased to pray for you.

He didn't even know these people directly. He only knew these people through epiphra and epiphra preaching, and yet Paul says, I continue to pray for you. Do you have a prayer list that touches the world? Do you pray for the persecuted church? Do you pray for worldwide evangelization? Do you pray for other churches in town who are hurting? Church, are we praying for the cause of Jesus Christ or are we praying about an ingrown toenail that's bothering us? My neighbor doesn't bring cheese rolls anymore.

All of our prayers are so selfish, so me-focused. I hope we can catch something of this phrase, I never ceased to pray for you, and see it as a mandate, a spiritual responsibility for one another. We're involved in each other's lives.

We're a part of the same family. And I think it's a note that we ought to... I mean, if Jesus got up early to pray before he made decisions, and Luke records this over and over, if the Son of God needed to pray regularly, how much more do we, who are caught in the flesh and caught in a fallen world system, need to pray? Amen? Now, some of you are not going to be able to come and distribute these CDs. I think you ought to be in a room by yourself praying while the rest who can do.

Amen? And don't tell me there's anything more important than that because we lose sight of the eternality of the gospel which we serve when we get caught in the selfishness of our daily lives. Not you, but the Baptists in California. Now, I think it's interesting when he says that you may be filled.

Now, a couple of things in this verse 9 speak to me. Number one, do you see the recurrent use of words that talk about knowledge and wisdom and understanding in there? And the word filled. Now, this is where we have to interpret the Bible in light of its original historical context.

I have mentioned in this opening sermon on Colossians this was directly written to Gnostic false teachers. A group of people who claim secret knowledge from God, a group of intellectuals who kind of started an elite group and you had to join them to have this secret knowledge, a real emphasis on knowledge, but an emphasis on secret knowledge. And Paul combats that.

And he combats it, first of all, by saying that real wisdom and knowledge is in Jesus Christ. And secondly, he's going to say, he's going to take some of their slogans, some of their key theological words, and he's going to put them back into a biblical frame of reference and not a Greek philosophical frame of reference. Now, the word filled is the word pleroma and it is the word used for the angelic levels between a high holy God and a lesser God that could form matter.

And it is these angelic levels or eons that you have to know the secret password in Gnosticism to get to heaven when you die. Not faith in Jesus Christ, but secret knowledge. So Paul takes that false truth and says that we are to be filled with the knowledge, and this is not just the word gnosis, this is the intensified form that implies personal experiential knowledge.

He's praying for them that they understand clearer, that their experience is more real. I almost think Paul must have thought back to his own encounter personally with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. He repeats that three times in the sermons and acts.

Something radically happened to him. He met the risen Lord and he can't be the same. And I think that ought to be a word for us.

We claim to have met the risen Lord by faith and I hope that we can't be the same. So this emphasis on knowledge, emphasis on being filled, these are all Paul beginning to deal with these false teachers in subtle ways. And then in verse 10, look at your translation, mine has walk in a manner worthy.

First thing I would say is if we're going to talk about an intimate experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ, we're going to have to talk about daily Christ-like living. Don't tell me you can separate faith from faithfulness. Don't tell me the gospel is a creed to be signed or truths to be mantra-ed.

No, no, no. It is a life to be lived in honor of God. It is lay yourself as a living sacrifice on the altar of God, Romans 12.

And Paul never, never focuses on this idea of truth and knowledge without an emphasis on live out that truth and knowledge. Americans are really guilty of compartmentalizing their lives into sacred and secular. I submit to you there is no sacred and secular in the kingdom of God.

All of life is sacred because God created us and wants us to know him. Walk in a manner worthy. This is a completed action emphasis.

This is the make a decision and do it emphasis. Now following this, this is an aorist infinitive, are four present participles. Now you say, well, is this important? It is crucial.

This is the way the inspired author is organizing his thoughts. This is the way he's presenting the truth. He's going to tell us what it means to walk worthy.

He's going to outline for us the steps. Now, notice if you will. The first, the first, by the way, when I saw this walk worthy, does that remind you of Paul in Ephesians 2.10? You know, the 8 and 9, Ephesians 2, 8 and 9, may be the Baptist theme song.

I mean, we quote those all the time. We love Ephesians 8 and 9. But right after that tremendous passage on grace, and it's not of ourselves, you were created in Christ Jesus for good works, that it was foreordained you should walk in them. That's verse 10.

This Colossian and Ephesians outline are connected. The thoughts are connected. I guess I'm screaming not only for a true profession of faith, but a real lifestyle of faith as being intricately part to New Testament Christianity.

Now, the first of these four participles is the bearing fruit in every good work. Now, I'm surprised that's here because we use the bearing fruit metaphor back in 3 through 8. He's returning to it again. And I'm ashamed to say that I do not know what New Testament fruit means.

I mean, is it Christlikeness? Is it evangelism? Is it loving your neighbor? Is it don't spit that? I don't know what it is. I remember that politician, he said, I don't know what pornography is, but when I see it, I recognize it. Remember that guy? I'm not sure I know what the fruit is, but when I see it, I recognize it.

And I think what it is is the life of Jesus Christ lived out in the daily experiences of human beings. And sometimes that's a word of confrontation and love. And sometimes that's a word of compassion.

And sometimes that's a word of challenge. And sometimes that's a word of acceptance. I don't know what the fruit is, but I know the goal of it is not just good works that glorify us, but good works where they see our good works and glorify our Father, because they know we were never capable of that before an indwelling Holy Spirit.

Do your friends and relatives, are they amazed by the way you love them, forgive them, challenge them, walk with them? This is what I'm calling for, a distinctive Christ-likeness in our daily interpersonal relationships. So the first one is bearing fruit. The gospel ought to bear fruit.

And I want to remind you again of the shocking parable of the soils, where of the four soils, three germinated, but two of the three died. And the emphasis is not initial germination, but ongoing fruit bearing. And it's not how much fruit, and it's not what kind of fruit, it's that the Christian life is meant to bear fruit.

Bear fruit. Bear fruit. Now, notice the increasing in knowledge.

Here again, second of these present participles, Paul wants these Christians to understand the gospel. I really think that much of our lack of assurance in Baptist life, and much of our confusion has to do with we have not clearly understood an absolutely free gospel and the finished work of Jesus Christ, and an absolutely cost-everything Christian life. Now, you can't be saved without the initial drawing of the Holy Spirit.

I do believe you must respond. I do believe in a covenant understanding of this. But the Spirit comes first, and we respond, and in that, salvation floods our life.

The same thing is true of the Christian life. This is not trudge it out, hang on, don't grow weary, just keep on fighting. No! As salvation is the initiation of the Spirit, a filling of the Spirit, if you will, based on our yieldedness, so too is the Christian life initiated by the Holy Spirit, filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Christian life is as supernatural a gift as is salvation. But as we must open the door for salvation, we must continue to open the door for Christ-like daily living. And I want to tell you, the easiest thing in my life is trusting Jesus Christ, and the hardest thing is trying to live for him since then.

Absolutely free and cost-everything. It's so confusion to us. Increasing in the knowledge.

This, again, I think is epigenosco. This is the full and experiential knowledge, not just he lived in Palestine, I believe he's Jewish, I believe his mother's name was Mary. See, that cognitive thing, that Greek way of looking at knowledge, and that's what the false teachers were kind of into.

This truth, that truth, this doctrine, that doctrine. But knowing Jesus is an intimacy. It's the Hebrew focus on the word know.

And I think that's what we miss. That's what we try to express and have a personal relationship with. We need to know him, not just about him.

That's important, that's true. I don't want to appreciate that. But the number one thing is know him.

We've been in Hebrews, you know. And the whole point of Hebrews is Moses is a servant who understood some things, but Jesus is a family member. He's grown and with the Father always.

He knows him intimately, and he shares him with us. The third part of Staples is in verse 11. Strengthened with all power.

Now, I'm not 100% sure how this relates. This word is always used for God's power, never human strength, so this is not let's suck it up and be Christian. No, no, no.

Sometimes, I guess I'm bothered by how many rocks are in the glass. I keep asking for the Lord to fill it up, and he keeps saying, I did fill it up. There's a bunch of rocks in there, and not much room for the spirit because all the other stuff you got in there.

It's kind of like, I want to be a channel, Lord. I want your grace to flow through me. But the problem is, we get these rocks and things in the channel.

I think we got to realize that what flows from God is of God and not of us. Amen? It is his strength, it is his power, but we're responsible to keep that channel, that tube open, and that takes confession and repentance and reading the Bible and prayer and interpersonal relationship, all of that. We're responsible for maintaining the conduit.

He's responsible for the power, the truth to flow through that conduit. Again, it's my understanding of this covenant relationship. Now, notice where it says steadfastness and patience.

Now, this is not the fourth participle at all, of course, but this is kind of, these are really synonymous, I think. They have a slight distinction, but I think they're talking about patience, patience in trials, patience in problems, patience in a fallen world. I do think we grow weary too often.

I do think we give up too quickly. I do think we come embittered at life's experiences and blame it on God. We've got to be steadfast and patient, knowing God will use us, God wants to use us, that our lives make a difference.

There is an eternity factor for every one of us here. We don't do the same things, and yet God is using his entire family to reach a lost and fallen world. We need to be available, and we need to take our eyes off what we perceive are the problems, inconsistencies, and we need to focus back on who it is that calls us and the power and strength that come from him through us to a lost and needy world.

Now, I also like the word joyously. I'm not sure exactly where this thing connects to. It's somewhere in verse 11, either strength and power or the steadfast and patience, I'm just not sure.

But I guess one of the things that characterizes... Well, let me just use an example. I was in India years ago with a displaced language group, and pastor took me to a little Indian house to buy tracts. This little family, the man wasn't there, but the wife was there, and they had tracts in all the different languages of India, so we got some Telugu tracts.

And before we left, the Indian pastor asked this little lady to pray. It's been decades in my life, and I still remember this little lady just dropping to her knees in this home and beginning to pray. I just felt like I was in the presence of God.

I'm struck by her sense of intimacy with the Lord, her joy in midst of such poverty and need, her sense of God's presence and empowering. And I live in the presence of such abundance. I don't lack for anything.

And I'm not surrounded by joy. I'm surrounded by other peoples who live in the lap of luxury and gripe about everything, everything. Has knowing Jesus made you a joyful person? If not, I want to know why.

What is it about life that's bugging you? If your face is happy, you need to tell it. Sound like a song later, don't I? Verse 12 begins the fourth participle, and my goodness, look what it is. Giving thanks.

I still like those staccato imperatives of 1 Thessalonians 5 at the end. I just think joyful and giving thanks seem to characterize those who truly walk with Jesus, and it has nothing to do with circumstance. In this particular place, it is specifically giving thanks to the Father.

Giving thanks to the Father. Things weren't going well in Colossae. Things were not going well in Colossae.

Paul's in prison, and he tells them to joyfully give thanks. And we're griping because our Cadillac got scratched at the Piggly Wiggly. Tree fell on my clothesline.

Well, no clothesline, powerline. And I didn't have power for three hours. We are just spoiled, nitpicking, griping, and no wonder nobody wants to come and be with us.

Where is the joyfulness of eternal salvation, eternal security, eternal purpose, a peace that passes all understanding, the indwelling Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sin, and we sit here without being joyful and thankful? What do you want, you big weenie? Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us. Now, made us fit, made us acceptable. I think we're talking about the sanctification process here.

To share an inheritance. Now, again, I want to go back to you and say that I think what's happening, in Paul's theology, I think Paul knew that Israel was to be a kingdom of priests. Goes back to the foot of Mount Sinai, Exodus 19.

He also knows that there is a tribal group that do not inherit land, but are said to have the Lord as their inheritance, the Levites, priest and Levites. And in the New Testament, the special position of the Levites to approach God, an intimacy with God, an access to God, God as their inheritance, seems to be transferred in the New Testament authors to the place of the Christian. We could go that way, or we could say maybe it's based on Romans 8, where Jesus Christ is heir, remember Hebrews 1, this point, he's heir of all things, and we're what? Co-heirs with him.

So maybe that inheritance is coming from what we're about to do, which is glorify the Son in verses 15 through 20. Whatever the origin here, we're to share in the inheritance of the saints, and I want to remind you, the word saint never appears in the singular, except in Philippians 4, I believe it's 13, where it says greet every saint, which means it's still plural. The moment you're saved as an individual response to the call of God is the moment you become part of the family of God.

Christianity is a corporate experience, not an individual experience. And don't you like the little phrase of the saints in the light? Now, throughout the Bible, there is a contrast between dark and light being metaphors that describe good and evil, and I think there's something here, particularly when we get to verse 13, and this same imagery is picked up on. Now, I wish I knew what verses 13 and 14 are.

To me, it looks like that there's definitely a transition here, and it looks like that we're preparing to talk about the Son in verses 15 through 20, because we're going to start saying some of the things the Son did, but verses 15 through 20 is almost like a poem or an early Christian hymn, and this does not fit that metric pattern. But it is a beginning or a contrast from thanking God to getting into thanking God for the Son. So notice what it says.

He, verse 13, now that has got to be God the Father, because we're going to talk about the Son did, so it's got to be God the Father again. He delivered us, and this is an emphasis again on God himself once and for all kind of format. He himself delivered us from the domain of darkness.

Now, that doesn't grab me as much until I know that the word domain is this Greek word for authority, exousia, the power to accomplish something. I'm removed from the power of the evil one, and I'm put into the kingdom power of his beloved Son. What a tremendous old man, new man.

What a tremendous once I was lost and now I'm found. Something marvelous. He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us, relocated us, resettled us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.

Remember that title, beloved Son? At the baptism, at the transfiguration, his beloved Son, in whom we have. Now, this word redemption, there are two Hebrew words, ransom and redeem. Both of them have the idea of buying someone back from slavery.

The only distinction is, remember the Goel of the book of Ruth? That's the idea of a rich uncle, rich family member purchasing you back. It's another emphasis on biblical metaphors for the family used to describe intimacy with God. That's why we call him father, son, children, born again.

All those are family kind of metaphors. Well, this redemption is another emphasis on that. And here we have this, we've been bought from the kingdom of darkness and transferred to the authority of his beloved Son, in whom we have the forgiveness of sin.

Now, there are several different words for sins, a bunch of them. This is the word that means to send away. I just wonder how much of this imagery is based on the Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, Leviticus 16.

Some of the words for sin have to do with covering, and that's caught up in what the high priest does in the holy of holies on the mercy seat. But this one, if you know the procedures of the day of atonement, there is an animal that dies, two of them that die, and one of them, the hands of the high priest are laid on this animal. The sins of Israel collectively, it's corporate guilt here, ceremonial guilt, is driven off into the desert to symbolically take away the sin from the camp.

I remember reading in early Judaism when they were trying to get this goat to leave, the goat kept coming back, which messed up the symbolism. Probably was more real than one imagined, but the stupid goat kept coming back. So they found this cliff, and so they would push the goat off the cliff, and the goat wasn't coming back.

But the whole point here is, I still meet many Christians who say to me, oh, Bob, I did something just this week. I was in Granbury, a wonderful leader in this church, wonderful, just a wonderful Christian. I think the devil just got ahold of him, and he started mentioning to me things about the war that he had done that were bothering him.

I said, you know, those things are past. There is absolutely nothing we can do about that. You have been absolutely forgiven in Christ, and if you have sinned since then, we have 1 John 1, 9, amen? If we've confessed our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But what the devil does to us is come back to our faults and failures in the past and bring them up to us, throw them up to us again. And what we've got to say to him is, that it's dealt with and gone. Because when God forgives, finish the next line, God forgets, hallelujah? The sin is taken away.

Now, if you're here today, and you're grieving about something you did and something you said, you are a big dummy. Yes, you've said some stupid things. Yes, you've done some stupid things.

And the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. We can't affect the past. We can't change the past.

There's nothing we can do about it. We can claim the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf. We can claim his imputed righteousness.

We can claim the filling of the Holy Spirit. And we can claim the ongoing promise of forgiveness in 1 John 1, 9. And we can claim the forgetfulness of God that these sins are removed. Do I need to go through the litany of Isaiah? As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us.

As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high has he removed our sins from us. He has placed them behind his back and will remember them no more. He has dropped them in the deepest part of the sea.

He has erased them. Come on, Christians. Let the past be the past.

And let's get on being the people of God in our day, in our time. And it's gonna start with this CD distribution this week. And if you can't make it, you're gonna pray, right? Lord, thank you for another wonderful text in Colossians.

Thank you for the great truth of this book. Thank you that though false teaching and false teachers are always with us, that the truth and reality of your promises, of your revelation, sustain us in days of doubt, confusion, and uncertainty. I pray today, Lord, as these different truths were dealt with in Paul's prayer to you, that the Christians here who need these different points of emphasis, and I'm sure that different ones need to hear different points, that you would draw them to yourself in a love and persuasion that will not let them go.

That you will embolden them to face the lost world in confidence and assurance that you're with us and for us. And thank you for accepting us in your Son. And thank you for being with us.

And thank you for all the things you're doing in our lives. We rejoice because of who you are and we rejoice because of who you are in us. Please keep us from the evil one.

Keep us from the evil of our own hearts. Keep us from the evil that's in the world and help friends and family, coworkers and neighbors know that we've been with you. Amen.

I don't know what God said to you today. I hope he said something. Many have prayed for the service.

We ask the Holy Spirit to be here. I think none of that is in vain. If God has spoken to you, you need to respond to whatever God has said.

Your church staff will be here. They love you and care for you. They'll show you in the Scriptures what you need to hear.

And I ask you to respond in any way that God has put something on your heart as we stand together in his name.

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